



MyCareer@VA Program

CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES WORKBOOK

INTRODUCTION

What is Career Development?

For the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), career development is the critical process of growing employees to help them fulfill VA's mission and provide top-quality service to Veterans and their families.

For you as an employee, career development is choosing a job that matches your interests and skills and building on those skills through the many resources and opportunities made available to you at VA.

Why Does Career Development Matter?

Career development matters because Veterans cannot be served without a skilled workforce. Without employees like you, VA cannot meet its mission. This is why you, your career, and your career choices are so important.

As an employee, career development matters because in pursuing personal growth and development in your career, you are able to identify and use your best skills and talents. This makes you more engaged in your work and able to do your job better by providing high-quality service to Veterans and their families.

Career development is not a one-time event, but a process. It consists of four phases that can be revisited at any point in your career.

MyCareer@VA

Because of the importance of career development, VA launched the MyCareer@VA program in 2011. The program's website is publically available from work, home, or your mobile device. MyCareer@VA provides a variety of powerful, practical, and useful resources to help you take charge of your career.

Career Development Activities Workbook

The goal of this workbook is to guide you through the career development process by providing you with step-by-step activities that will help support your learning and development. In this workbook, you will be introduced to MyCareer@VA's four-phase planning process and the tools and resources that will help support you every step of the way.

INTRODUCTION

MyCareer@VA's Tools and Resources

MyCareer@VA offers a wide variety of tools and resources to support your development.



MY CAREER FIT TOOL

Helps you identify the type of work you like to do and the environment you like to do it in.



THE MY FEDERAL RESUME BUILDER

Helps you create a resume in the Federal format that highlights your skills and experience.



THE VA CAREER GUIDES

Helps you explore the different kinds of work you can do at VA.



ONLINE INTERVIEW PRACTICE

Helps you practice your interview skills by responding to common interview questions and recording your answers.



THE MY CAREER MAPPING TOOL

Helps you see different career paths and plot the steps each path requires.



ONLINE CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Includes web-based training courses, tip sheets, and videos featuring topics such as interviewing tips, the Individual Development Plan (IDP) process, and talking to your supervisor, just to name a few.



THE VA JOB FINDER

Helps you search current VA job openings based on a variety of factors, including job title and location.

INTRODUCTION

The Four Phases of Career Development

Each phase of career development will help you answer important questions about any job you are pursuing at VA. Understanding what to do in each of these four phases - which is the purpose of this workbook - is essential to your career growth.

Below is the four-phase career development process. As you move through this workbook, you will learn more about each phase.



INTRODUCTION

Career Development Assessment

As we begin our discussion, think about where you are in your own career development. Which of these questions best represents you?

Check “yes” or “no” in the “My Pre-Activities Assessment” on the left for each of the questions below.

As you work through activities in this workbook, you should be thinking about these questions. Once you complete the following activities in the workbook, we will revisit these questions to see how much you’ve learned.

MY PRE-ACTIVITIES ASSESSMENT

MY POST-ACTIVITIES ASSESSMENT

Yes No

Yes No

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know exactly which jobs at VA best fit my strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can identify jobs that match my work preferences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know my work preferences, including what type of work I like to do and the type of environment I like to work in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know my skills and how they fit with the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I think career development is complicated and don’t know where to begin.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know which resources can help me choose a career at VA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have someone to help me make decisions about my career path.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have done research on the occupation that interests me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know who to talk to about getting career information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to find career information on my own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know what resources can help me develop my skills to get the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know what training I need to develop my skills to get the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to develop a plan to get the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know my career path at VA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know the various steps that need to be taken to get a new job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to apply for a job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to write a Federal resume that highlights my skills and experience to get the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to prepare for an interview to get the job I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to best present my skills and abilities to an employer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



In this phase, you should focus on learning more about yourself, your interests, strengths, limitations, and most importantly, your goals.

Work through the activities below to better understand yourself and where you want to go in your career.

Assess: Activities Using MyCareer@VA

- ❑ Make a list of work-related skills.
- ❑ Make a list of the activities, skills, and work environments that are most important to you in a job.
- ❑ Use the My Career Fit Tool to discover what types of jobs best match your work preferences (read more about the Fit Tool in the right-hand column).
- ❑ Read more about each of your job matches identified by the Fit Tool.
- ❑ Reflect on your Fit Tool results. How are your job matches the same or different from your current job?
- ❑ Make a list of questions you would like to ask to learn more about your job matches.

Assess: All about the My Career Fit Tool

What is the Fit Tool?

The Fit Tool asks you questions so you can learn about your work interests and work environment preferences. Then it helps match your work preferences to jobs you may want to learn more about.

Why is the Fit Tool important to you?

Some people think that a job is only about a title or money, but enjoying what you do is equally, if not more, important. The Fit Tool can help you find the job that gives you the greatest sense of satisfaction.

Where is the Fit Tool on MyCareer@VA?

You can get to the Fit Tool by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://go.usa.gov/5KhG>

Then, select the "Work Interests Questionnaire" button to get started!



SMART Goals for the **Assess** Phase

Now that you know about self-assessment, take time to set goals for yourself. To help you be successful, it is important that your goals be SMART.

Specific: Do I have a clear understanding of what I need to do?

Measurable: How will I know if I am making progress toward my goals?

Attainable: Can I reach this goal?

Realistic: Is it reasonable that I can achieve this goal in my current job?

Time-based: When will I reach this goal?

An example of a SMART goal:

By the end of 2015, I will complete the School at Work Program through my facility. I will identify eligibility requirements and will work with my supervisor to get a recommendation to participate in the program. I will practice my expanded skills on the job.

Write your SMART goals for the Assess phase in the space below.

S
M
A
R
T

“ Many people fail in life, not for lack of ability or brains or even courage, but simply because they have never organized their energies around a goal.”

—ELBERT HUBBARD



EXPLORE

If you know your goals, but you're not quite sure how to achieve them, you are likely in the Explore phase. This phase focuses on exploring the many possibilities at VA and what it takes to move from where you are now to where you want to be.

Work through the activities below to better understand where you want to go in your career.

Explore: Activities Using MyCareer@VA

VA Career Guides

- ☐ Find the Career Guides on MyCareer@VA.
- ☐ Using the Career Guides, pick two occupational families to read about. Occupational families are a group of jobs that share similar job functions and skills. For example, the "Cemetery Operations" occupational family consists of jobs like "Cemetery Administrator," "Cemetery Caretaker," and "Cemetery Representative."
- ☐ Compare the selected occupational families in the areas below:
 - **Across VA:** To find out how many jobs exist at VA.
 - **Across the U.S.:** To pinpoint where in the U.S. these jobs are located.
 - **Career Progression:** To find how many positions at VA are in each occupational family. Which occupational family has more jobs?
- ☐ Select the "Explore Jobs" tab and select one of the jobs listed. Read about:
 - **Job Duties:** Look at the list of job duties. How are they similar to the ones you carry out now? How are they different?
 - **Knowledge Areas:** What does a person need to know in these fields?
 - **Education and Licensure:** What is required for this job? What is recommended for this job?
 - **Professional Associations:** Which associations are key to this field?
 - **Training:** What training opportunities are available?
 - **Developmental Experiences:** What experiences are recommended at the entry level? What about the mid level?
- ☐ Repeat and review—you can do this for every job that interests you.
- ☐ Compare what you learn about different jobs, and choose one to explore further.
- ☐ Talk to your supervisor or colleague about setting up a meeting with someone in the occupational field that interests you. This will expand your understanding of that field beyond the information provided by the Career Guides.



Explore: Activities Using MyCareer@VA

My Career Mapping Tool

- ☐ Find the Mapping Tool on MyCareer@VA.
- ☐ Enter your current job or a potential starting job from your Fit Tool results or from your research on the Career Guides.
- ☐ Select the “Compare” button to explore three jobs side-by-side. Discover which job is best for you by determining the following:
 - **Occupational Family:** Which general occupational family does the job fall into?
 - **Series:** What is the overall series of the job?
 - **Grade Level:** What is the pay grade level associated with each job?
 - **Competencies and Knowledge Areas:** Which competencies and knowledge areas are required by the job?
 - **Gaps:** Which skill areas are in your current job and which do you need to develop for your target job?
 - **Education and Licensure:** What requirements exist for the position?
 - **Current Job Openings:** Where are the jobs for this position?
 - **Suggested Next Steps:** What is the typical career path for this position at VA, and what steps do you need to take to get there?
- ☐ Create your potential career map, and then choose three to five specific jobs you might be interested in.



EXPLORE

Explore: All about the VA Career Guides and the My Career Mapping Tool

Career Guides

What are the Career Guides?

The content of the Career Guides was developed by experts in each occupational family. Because the Career Guides are based on the experiences of real VA employees, they will provide you with accurate and detailed information about each career field and what it takes to be successful.

Why are the Career Guides important to you?

The Career Guides give you the details about jobs at VA. You can see current job openings, as well as the knowledge, developmental experiences, and education needed to succeed in them.

Mapping Tool

What is the Mapping Tool?

The Mapping Tool is a one-of-a-kind resource that helps you explore different job options and career paths, even in career fields outside your current position.

Why is the Mapping Tool important to you?

The Mapping Tool helps you identify the skills and training you need to move into a new position or field at VA.

Finding the Explore Tools

Where are the key Explore tools on MyCareer@VA?

You can get to the Mapping Tool by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://go.usa.gov/5kqC>

Then, enter your current job to get started!

You can get to the Career Guides by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://go.usa.gov/5kqW>

Then, select the Explore Career Guides button to get started!



SMART Goals for the Explore Phase

Now that you know about exploring occupations, take time to set goals for yourself. To help you be successful, it is important that your goals be SMART.

Specific: Do I have a clear understanding of what I need to do?

Measurable: How will I know if I am making progress toward my goals?

Attainable: Can I reach this goal?

Realistic: Is it reasonable that I can achieve this goal in my current job?

Time-based: When will I reach this goal?

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____

“ A goal is a dream with a deadline.”
—NAPOLEON HILL



If you already have a clear understanding of yourself and your career goals, your challenge is to come up with a concrete plan to make progress toward your goals. This may include both short- and long-term plans.

Plan: Activities Using MyCareer@VA

- ☐ Identify a mentor at your facility. This could be a certified mentor (your Human Resources Department should be able to provide you with a list) or an individual at your facility whom you trust.
- ☐ Revisit your Mapping Tool results.
- ☐ Select your target job.
- ☐ Select the “Show Gaps” option under “Competencies/Knowledge Areas.” This section will show you the difference between the knowledge areas of your current job and the knowledge areas of your target job.
- ☐ Work with your supervisor or mentor to identify activities at work that can close your skill gaps. These activities can be learning from others like a colleague or a mentor, on-the-job by shadowing someone in your target job, or through formal training like taking a course in TMS.
- ☐ Share your information with a supervisor or mentor. Make sure you schedule regular check-ins so you can monitor your progress towards your goals.
- ☐ Create an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Plan: All about the MyCareer@VA IDP Resources

What is an Individual Development Plan (IDP)?

An IDP is a planning tool to assist employees in career development. It usually consists of three parts:

- A clear statement of your short-term career goals (within 1-3 years)
- A clear statement of your long-term career goals (5-10 years)
- A specific action plan for the next year

Why is an IDP important to you?

Good career goals and a clear plan will make the effort you put into career development more efficient.

Where are the key Plan resources tools on MyCareer@VA?

You can get to the IDP resources by typing the following web addresses into your browser:

- <http://go.usa.gov/5kqR>
- <http://go.usa.gov/5kqF>



SMART Goals for the Plan Phase

Now that you know about developing career plans, take time to set goals for yourself as part of the Plan phase of career development. To help you be successful, it is important that your goals be SMART.

Specific: Do I have a clear understanding of what I need to do?

Measurable: How will I know if I am making progress toward my goals?

Attainable: Can I reach this goal?

Realistic: Is it reasonable that I can achieve this goal in my current job?

Time-based: When will I reach this goal?

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____

“ It is not enough to take steps which may someday lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise.”

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE



TAKE ACTION

If you already have a clear understanding of yourself, where you want to go, and how you are going to get there, the final step is to implement your plan.

Take Action: Activities Using MyCareer@VA

- ☐ Find the Resume Builder on MyCareer@VA.
- ☐ Create a resume account and build a resume for one of the jobs you identified through the Mapping Tool.
- ☐ Have a colleague, friend, or mentor critique your resume.
- ☐ Use the VA Job Finder on MyCareer@VA to find current job openings that interest you.
- ☐ Find the Career Prep resources on MyCareer@VA.
- ☐ Practice interviewing through the Online Interview Practice tool.
- ☐ Develop your elevator speech and practice using the timer.
- ☐ Use TMS to add relevant courses to your career development to-do list.
- ☐ Complete relevant courses in your career development to-do list in TMS.
- ☐ Talk with your supervisor about opportunities for on-the-job learning.
- ☐ Schedule regular check-ins with your supervisor or mentor to continue your development.



TAKE ACTION

Take Action: All about the Federal Resume Builder and VA Job Finder

Federal Resume Builder

What is the Federal Resume Builder?

The Resume Builder helps you create a properly formatted resume that provides all of the information required by Federal government agencies. This will assist you in applying for Federal job vacancies.

Why is the Federal Resume Builder important to you?

The Resume Builder helps you make a lasting first impression by creating a resume that highlights your skills and experience. With this single, formatted resume, you will be ready to apply for all job opportunities at VA.

You can get to the Resume Builder by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://go.usa.gov/5k33>

Then, select "Create a new account" to get started!

Job Finder

What is the Job Finder?

The Job Finder is a search engine for job openings at VA. It allows you to search by specific job and location, read about job openings, and apply through USAJobs.

Why is the Job Finder important to you?

The Job Finder provides you with current job openings so you can jump on an opportunity the minute it arises.

You can locate the Job Finder by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://go.usa.gov/5k3T>

Then, enter a key word to get started!

InterviewStream

What is InterviewStream?

The Online Interview Practice tool is an interview tool that allows you to respond to common interview questions and records your answers. You have many different questions to choose from so that you are prepared for any interview.

Why is InterviewStream important to you?

You only get one chance to make a first impression. InterviewStream will help you practice your interview skills as many times as it takes to get it right.

You can practice your interviewing skills through InterviewStream by typing the following web address into your browser:

<http://bit.ly/mcvainterviewstream>

For other career preparation tools and resources, visit Career Prep by typing the following Web address into your browser: <http://1.usa.gov/1tIMJgx>



TAKE ACTION

SMART Goals for the Take Action Phase

Now that you know how to turn your plan into reality, take time to set goals for yourself while you are engaged in the Take Action phase of career development. To help you be successful, it is important that your goals be SMART.

Specific: Do I have a clear understanding of what I need to do?

Measurable: How will I know if I am making progress toward my goals?

Attainable: Can I reach this goal?

Realistic: Is it reasonable that I can achieve this goal in my current job?

Time-based: When will I reach this goal?

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____

“ Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another.”

—JOHN DEWEY



MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

ASSESS

My Assess Tasks

In one week, I will:

In one month, I will:

In three months, I will:

My Assess Results

I found out that I want a work environment that:

I found out that my most important interests are:

My Assess Developmental Tasks

Example: I will meet with a mentor to discuss my assessment results.

My Assess SMART Goals

(Transfer from the previous section)

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____



MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

EXPLORE

My Explore Tasks

In one week, I will:

In one month, I will:

In three months, I will:

My Explore Developmental Tasks

Example: I will talk to someone in the occupation I am most interested in.

My Explore Results

For my target job...

I found out that the occupation knowledge areas are: _____

I found out that the occupation education and licensure requirements are: _____

I found out that training opportunities for this occupation include: _____

I found out that the developmental experiences for this occupation include:

I found out that the name of the occupational family is:

I found out that the job series is: _____

My Explore SMART Goals

(Transfer from the previous section)

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____



MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

PLAN

My Plan Tasks

In one week, I will:

In one month, I will:

In three months, I will:

My Plan Results

I found out that the gaps between skill area possess and skill areas I need to develop are:

I found out that my opportunities to learn from others are:

I found out that my opportunities for on-the-job learning are: _____

I found out that my opportunities for formal training are: _____

My Plan Developmental Tasks

Example: I will look in the TMS to find courses to take in the occupation I am most interested in.

My Plan SMART Goals

(Transfer from the previous section)

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____



MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

TAKE ACTION

My Take Action Tasks

In one week, I will:

In one month, I will:

In three months, I will:

My Take Action Results: My Career Prep Checklist

- ☐ I have a Federal resume that is up to date and ready to use.
- ☐ I have identified three jobs that I want to apply for in the Job Finder.
- ☐ I have practiced my interview skills through InterviewStream.
- ☐ I have practiced a skill-based elevator speech for a potential employer.
- ☐ I have worked to 'learn from others.'
- ☐ I have participated in on-the-job training.
- ☐ I have taken formal training courses.

My Take Action Developmental Tasks

Example: I will have a mentor or colleague critique my resume and discuss changes.

My Take Action SMART Goals (Transfer from the previous section)

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____



MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

SUMMARY

Now, revisit the Career Development Assessment on page 5. Take the assessment again and fill in the “My Post-Activities Assessment” column on the right.

In which areas did you improve?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

In which areas do you still need more work?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Don't forget — career development is a lifelong process. Even in your dream job, you can continue to grow and learn!

